RAMADHAN AND ITS BLESSINGS

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Introduction

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful

For every spiritual exercise in Islam the ultimate aim is the attainment of God's pleasure through the regulation of one's life in accordance with His ordinances.

Of the five articles of faith of Islam. the fourth is fasting during the month of Ramadhan. The Holy Quran states:

O ye who believe, fasting is prescribed for you during a fixed number of days, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may (safeguard yourselves against moral and spiritual ills and) become righteous. But whoso from among you should be ailing (not being permanently incapacitated), or should be on a journey, shall complete the reckoning by fasting on a corresponding number of other days; and for those who find fasting a strain hard to bear is an expiation, the feeding of a poor person (if they can afford it). Whoso carries through a good work with eager obedience, it is the better for him. If you had knowledge you would realise that it is better for you that you should fast. The month of Ramadhan is the month in which the Quran began to be revealed , the Book which comprises guidance for mankind and clear proofs of guidance and divine Signs which discriminate between truth and falsehood. Therefore, he who witnesses this month, being stationary and in health, should fast through it. But whoso is ailing (not being permanently incapacitated), or is on a journey, should complete the reckoning by fasting on a corresponding number of other days. Allah desires ease for you and desires not hardship for you: He has granted you this facility so that you should encounter no hardship in completing the reckoning, and that you may exalt

Allah for His having guided you and that you may be grateful to Him. (2:184-186)

It is made lawful for you to consort with your wives during the night of the fast. They are as a garment for you and you are as a garment for them. Allah knows that you were being unjust to yourselves, wherefore He has turned to you with mercy and has corrected your error. So consort with them now without compunction and seek that which Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink till the break of dawn begins to manifest itself. From then on, complete the fast till nightfall. But do not consort with your wives during the period when you are in retreat in the mosques. These are the limits prescribed by Allah, so approach them not. Thus does Allah expound His commandments to the people, so that they may safeguard themselves against evil. (2:188)

Now, if Islam had claimed to be a religion and had not incorporated fasting as a discipline, can you imagine the mockery which would have been hurled by the Jews, the Christians, the Hindus, etc? But then can it be said that Islam copied this teaching from other religions? Yes, provided it is also said that Islam believes in the Unity of God, in His chosen prophets, His Sacred Books, in acting righteously, etc.

Thus, in the above verse, God Almighty warns Muslims that they must not think that they are the only ones who have been commanded to fast for a fixed number of days. Such a commandment existed for other religions as well. But look at them — what have they done to this commandment! A great majority of their believers today do not fast at all, or if they fast, they fast partially for one day a year. It is only in Islam that it became a principal article of faith and, although there are some noticeable exceptions, a vast majority of Muslims still adhere to this

commandment, fasting for a period longer than in any other faith.

Hinduism

Owing to the very many sects in Hinduism. it is difficult to find a code of standard practice although various days have been appointed for fasting. The fast commences in the evening and ends the next day with the sighting of the moon. During this time water may be drunk but nothing cooked may be had as food. This does not prevent the consumption of fruit, etc. Thus such a fast is a partial abstention from food and water.

Among certain Jain communities, females commence the fast in the early morning with a spoonful of previously boiled water and eat or drink nothing for several days. A kind God does not demand such extreme expiation from the believers.

Judaism

Although Moses is said to have fasted for a period of forty days (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9), Elijah went in the strength of one meal for forty days (I Kings 19:8), Esther announced her special fast for three days and nights (Esther 4:16), David's valiant men mourned the loss of Saul and his sons by fasting for seven days (I Chronicles 10:12), Daniel realising the significance of a vision continued a partial fast for three weeks (Daniel 10:2-3), yet the present practice amongst most Jews is to fast for twenty-four hours on the Day of Atonement. This again is a partial fast and nothing cooked may be had.

Christianity

Jesus is said to have stayed in the wilderness, without food, for forty days (Matthew 4:2; Mark 1-13; and Luke 4:2). He also

referred to three aspects of Christian behaviour in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-18): almsgiving, prayers and fasting. The reference 'be not like the Jews ...' refers to the fact that the Jews at that time wore sack cloth, disfiguring their faces so that they may appear as if fasting. It is quite clear that Jesus did not forbid fasting. rather he assumed that his disciples would continue to fast 'as those before them' though in the correct way and not as hyprocrites.

We are told in Matthew 9:14, Mark 2:18·20, Luke 5:33 and 18:12 that the Jews fasted either often or up to two days a week. The disciples of Jesus and the early Christians also fasted. Yet, like the Jews, ritualism crept in even among them and during the second century A.D. people fasted so that they may not be caught as exceptions. It was during the dark middle centuries that the eating of no meat on Wednesdays and Fridays, gave way to the Roman Catholic practice of eating fish on Fridays. Even Martin Luther goes on record complaining about the misuse of this form of fasting. Ritualism appears to have crystalised in the sixth century when fasting was made obligatory by the Didache (a manual of church order believed by some to have been compiled by the Apostles) and the Second Council of Orleans and it took the church nearly a thousand years later to disband the remaining remnants of this discipline. The Book of Common Prayer lists 16 observable days for vigils, fasts and remembrance: the Didache ordered fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays; Roman Catholics require that on Friday, no meal must be eaten; the Carmelite, Carthusian and Cistercian order regular fasting but among others it is virtually non-existant.

Again, the practice among some clergy to fast for a day, (first Sunday in Lent) missing up to three meals and yet to drink water is only a partial fast. The refraining from eating meat hardly accrues any benefits to one who is a vegetarian and such a one

would have been deprived of the benefits of fasting owing to one's inability to fast.

We observe that among domesticated animals, they totally abstain from food in order to restore their metabolism. This instinctive behaviour is caused by nature. It is also the practice to feed wild animals kept in captivity for six days a week. In fact, wild animals will often go without food for several days. It is strange therefore that nature should have required a period of sustained rest for our digestive system for other living things and that man should have forgotten such an important discipline.

In describing these various kinds of fasts of abstension of certain kinds of foods on the day of fasting as opposed to a total abstension of food and drink, we do not wish to ridicule such customs. Indeed it is possible that God Almighty may have required a race of hunters whose diet was entirely composed of meat to abstain from meat for say one day a week and partake a vegetarian diet to restore vitamins, etc., for the health and its effect on the morals of such people. In such a case, the commandment would have indeed been a blessing for those people at that time. Although there were various days of fasting for the people before Islam, their observance was not of the kind prescribed by Islam.

According to Ibo-Hisham. the Quraish tribe of Mecca used to retire to Mt. Hira for religious devotion and penance during the month of Ramadhan, abstaining from sex. etc., although this month was not regarded as a sacred month among the four pre-Islamic sacred months of Qadah, Hijjah, Muharram and Rajab. The word 'Rarnadhan' is an Islamic name as prior to Islam it was known as 'Nataq' (Fatah Al-Bayan). The word is derived from '*Ramada*'. They say *Ramada al-Salimu* i.e. the inside of the man fasting became very hot with thirst (Lane). The month is so

named because (1) fasting in this month produces heat and burning due to thirst, (2) worship in this month burns away the traces of sin in man (Asakir and Mardawaih) and (3) the necessary warmth of love for the Creator and His Created beings is generated in the hearts of those who fast.

Benefits of Fasting

It needs to be emphasised once again that the true benefits of fasting are spiritual and connected with religion. The physical benefits are also substantial and cannot be ignored. Some of the very many benefits are enumerated below:

1. It is an excellent religious discipline which trains the mind and body to cope with crisis, anger, hunger, thirst, etc. According to one mystic, the secret of life is to speak little, eat little and sleep little. All these disciplines are exercised during the month of fasting.

2. It encourages prayers, almsgiving, the doing of other good deeds and refraining from evil giving one power to overcome all evil.

3. It liberates the spirit to detach itself from worldly pursuits to seek a healthy living relationship with God Almighty thereby increasing one's faith. Man acquires for a period Godly attributes e.g., God does not sleep or eat, only goodness emanates from Him.

4. as great emphasis is placed on reciting the Holy Quran, it can be a wonderful source of guidance, and revelation or communion with God.

5. It also encourages the growth of grace, forbearance, fortitude, humility. simplicity. sacrifice — if man can sacrifice food and water, be can also sacrifice his life for God.

6. It restores one's health. Some doctors have developed a system of health through an almost exclusive use of fasting.

7. it is medically proven that those who fast for a long period regain a fine head of hair and recapture part of youth and physical growth.

8. in his book '*Preservation of Health*,' Dr. H. A. Morton Whitby, a well-known surgeon has shown that over-eating can have very dire consequences and that fasting can be a genuine source of health. Dr. Otto H F. Buckinger in his book 'About Fasting' takes the same view.

9. It cures addiction to alcoholism, drugs, smoking which are all injurious to one's health.

10. It curbs carnal pleasures of the flesh so that sexual desires are not misspent.

These are but a few of the very many benefits of fasting.

Bishop Jeremy Taylor once wrote: 'He who would recount the benefits of fasting, might just as well in the next page, attempt to enumerate the benefits of medicine.'

Blessings of Ramadhan

Fasting is an old universal institution, practised since ancient times. A study of the Old Testament books, Exodus and Samuel, shows that Moses and other Israelite Prophets, on whom be peace, observed the ritual of fasting on important occasions. So did Jesus, as is said of him in Matthew (4:2-3): "And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, then be felt hungry." Indeed, Jesus, on whom be peace, is reported to have told his disciples in Matt. 17 that evil spirits cannot be exorcised except through prayer and fasting. In Matt. 6 he appears to have gone to considerable lengths to describe the manner in which fasting should be carried out. He says:

> "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face. That you appear not to men to fast, but to your Father which is in secret: and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly." (Matthew 6:17-18)

In Encyclopaedia Brittanica, p. 104, Vol. IX, Fasting is explained as follows:

> "Commonest by far, however, of all the uses of voluntary fasting, in the past and at the present time, is its practice as an act of self-denial with definite religious intention. By the greater number of religions, in the lower middle and higher cultures a like, fasting is largely prescribed, and where it is not required it is nevertheless practised to some extent by individuals in response to the prompting of nature."

Objectives of Observing Fasts

The Quranic verse quoted on pages 4 and 5 stipulates three objectives for fasting:

1. "*So that you may become righteous.*" The very act of fasting to comply with the commandment of Allah, creates a sense of obedience to Him which leads man to conduct his life generally in accordance with His wishes, avoiding evil tendencies and doing good all round for the attainment of His pleasure. Thus is righteousness achieved.

2. "*That you may exalt Allah for His having guided you.*" The prime object of man's creation is to exalt Allah and that is why during the month of Ramadhan and during the Eid prayers following it considerable stress is laid on the recitation of *Takbir.*

3. "*That you may be grateful.*" This is a necessary corollary to the attainment of the two preceding objectives.

Attributes of the Month of Ramadhan

The month of Ramadhan carries many special attributes which have been described by no less an authority than the Holy Prophet himself, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Some of these are:

1. *The opener of Paradise.* Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said that from the first night of the month of Ramadhan, satanic forces are chained, rebellious elements are disciplined and the shutters of Hell are drawn without exception. All the gates of Paradise are opened and a crier shouts: O the seeker of righteous deeds proceed, and O the recliner to evil intentions desist. Many sinners are granted

amnesty from Hell, and this occurs every night of the month." (Bukhari and Muslim).

2. *Abstention from evil tendencies.* Abu Huraira says that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: When Ramadhan arrives the gates of Paradise are opened and the gates of hell are locked up and satans are put in chains. (Bukhari and Muslim).

3. *Month of Munificent Charity.* Ibn Abbas relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was the most generous of men and he was at his most bountiful during Ramadhan when Gabriel visited him every night and recited the Quran to him. During this period the bounty of the Holy Prophet waxed faster than the rain-bearing breeze (Bukhari and Muslim).

4. *Intercession from Quran and the Fast.* Abdallah bin Amar says that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said that the fasting and the Quran intercede with Allah on behalf of a servant. Fast shall say: O my Lord, I kept this man from food and other physical comforts throughout the day, so please God, condescend to my intercession on his behalf. And Quran will plead: I kept him away from sleep at night, so please accept my recommcndation for him. Both these intercessions would be carried.

5. *Basic purpose of fasting.* Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said that if one did not eschew falsehood and false conduct, Allah has no need that he should abstain from eating and drinking. (Bukhari). In Arabic language, falsehood includes wrong deeds, illegal means, bribery, adulteration, make believe, musical concerts, etc.

6. *Excellence of Fasting over other exercises.* Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: A man's good works carry multiple rewards, from ten times to seven hundred times. Allah says: A fast is an exception, for it is observed for My sake and I shall bestow the reward for it. He who observes a fast gives up his passion and his food for My sake. For such a one there are two joys: a joy when he breaks his fast and a joy when he meets his Lord. His breath is purer in the estimation of Allah than the fragrance of musk. The fast is a shield. When any of you is fasting he should eschew loose talk and noisy exchanges. Should anyone revile him or seek to pick a quarrel with him, be should respond: I am observing a fast. (Bukhari and Muslim).

7. *Rayyan — chambers of Paradise.* Saad ibn Sahl relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: There is a gate of Paradise called Rayyan through which only those will enter on the Day of Judgment who are regular in observing the fast and no one else. A call will go forth: Where are those who observed the fast regularly? and they will step forth and no one beside them will enter through that gate. After they have entered the gate will be closed and no one else will enter thereby. (Bukhari and Muslim).

8. *The Holy Prophet's sermon on Ramdhan.* Salman the Farasi relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, delivered us a sermon on the last day of the month of Shaaban and said: O people, a great month has dawned upon you, a month of blessings in which there is the Lailatul Qadr[1] (Night of Decree) which is better than a thousand months. Fasting during the month is obligatory from God and nightly prayers are voluntary. Anyone who

partakes of a good deed in it is like the one who discharges an obligatory ritual in other months. Anyone who discharges an obligatory article in this month is like the one who discharges seventy of them in other months. This was a month of patience and patience has its reward in Paradise. This was a month of reconcilliation and a month in which a believer's wealth was enhanced. Anyone who fed a fasting person at the time of his breaking fast will have his sins remitted, will be shielded from fire and will earn a reward equivalent to that earned by the person who fasted without the latter suffering any diminution. We asked the Holy Prophet that not every one of us could afford to help feed a fasting person. The Holy Prophet replied that this kind of reward would be available even if a little quantity of milk, yogurt or water was offered at the time of breaking the fast. Anyone who fed a satisfying meal to a fasting person would be offered drinks from my springs so that he would never suffer any thirst to the day he enters Paradise. The earlier part of the month was mercy, its middle remission from sins and the last portion was manumission from fire. Anyone who lightened the work of his servants in this month will have his sins forgiven by God and will find himself saved from fire.

9. *Fasting — a peerless act.* Abu Imamah relates that he asked the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, for an advice which could be beneficial to him from God, and he replied that he should keep fasts for there was nothing quite like them.

10. *Skipping fast without excuse.* Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said that anyone who did not fast on any of the days of Ramadhan without lawful excuse or illness would never be able to ransom the loss even if he fasted for the rest of his

life.

The Holy Quran, wisely refrains from defining the terms 'ailing' or 'journey' leaving them to be defined by common usage of the people and the attending circumstances. If doctors do not recommend fasting, one must refrain from fasting.

11. *Hypocritical fasting.* Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: Many a fasting person had nothing except the suffering of thirst. and many a person standing in nightly prayers had nothing but suffering sleeplessness — and no reward.

There are various kinds of blessings of God Almighty which accrue to a Muslim, both as an individual and as a brotherhood of mankind, when he prays, or fasts, or does both, or gives alms, or performs the Haj or fulfills all these obligations. One apparent difference between prayers and fasting is that in the case of prayers, the ablution (wudhu) becomes void on the ejection of food and water, whereas in the case of fasting, the fast is invalidated upon the swallowing of food and water. For prayers, that which leaves the body, admittedly impure, breaks the wudhu; for fasting, that which enters the body, though wholesome and nourishing, breaks the fast. A person enjoys the true blessings of prayers as long as his 'wudhu' is intact and a good Muslim will always try to safeguard himself accordingly. He will even control his emotions and will not let loose in a fit of anger lest his *wudhu* be treated broken. He will also endeavour to refrain from listening to lies and backbiting nor permit these evils to enter him lest his *fast* be broken. Unlike other forms of worship, the discipline of fasting involves abstention, desisting and relinquishing and by its very nature is concealed from

human sight, whereas other forms of worship like prayers, giving of alms, pilgrimage are apparent and exposed to human sight. It is an inward act of worship and a method of subduing Satan.

a. Said to be the night when the Holy Quran began to be revealed. This was on 24th of the month now known as Ramadhan (Jarir)

Rules of Fasting

Beginning the Month of Ramadhan

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: start the month after sighting the new moon and end it at the next sighting. If you are unable to observe it by reason of the sky being overcast, postpone the fast by a day. (Bukhari and Muslim). Muslim adds: If you are unable to observe the new moon at the end of Ramadhan, observe the fast for the thirtieth day.

Ibn Abbas relates that a man from the outskirts of the town came to the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and reported that he had sighted the moon. The Holy Prophet asked him whether he would state this on oath that there was no God but Allah and that Muhammad was His Messenger. The man took the oath, whereupon the Holy Prophet instructed Bilal to announce that people should start fasting the next morning.

Talha ibn Ubaidullah relates that on seeing the New Moon, the Holy Prophet would supplicate: Allah, do Thou cause the appearance of this moon to be a harbinger of peace, faith, security and Islam for us. Thy Lord, O Moon, and mine is Allah. May this be a moon presaging guidance and good. (Tirmidhi).

The Times

As is well known, the phases of the moon result from the relative positions of the earth, moon and sun and at the opposition and conjunction of the moon's orbit around the earth (on average 29 days, 12 hours and 44.5 minutes) appear the Full Monn and the New Moon. Every solar year contains 12.37 lunar months, and as

the years roll by, with the month of fasting moving from summer, through spring, winter and autumn, the cycle is completed in thirty-three years, each lunar year commencing about 11⅓ solar days earlier than the previous. A man who fasts the first full month of Ramadhan at the age of 18 years during the shorter winter days would fast again at the age of 50 in the same winter days according to the solar calendar. Apart from inhabitants of equatorial countries where the length of days throughout the year remains approximately equal, no undue perpetual hardship accrues for longer than a decade to those who live along the further latitudes.

Improved means of communication have meant that people living in a country can be told of the sighting of the new moon by a Qadi should the new moon not have been sighted in another locality. If confusion still exists the foregoing traditions should form the basis of guidance. People often question the significance of 'New Moon' as quoted in Almanacs and appearing in the weather section of most newspapers. It is emphasised that at 'New Moon', *the moon cannot be seen* at the time indicated and allowance has to be made for the appearance of the first crescent. This is because the 'New Moon' phase is at conjunction to the position of the earth.

The fast begins approximately an hour before sun-rise. Some people have been too pedantic about the words 'the break of dawn begins to manifest itself.' In the past, some Muslims used to sleep with two threads under their pillow, one black, the other white, and dawn was determined when they could clearly distinguish one from the other. The guiding principle is that before sun-rise when the rays of sun-shine become visible, there should be time enough to complete the recitation of fifty verses of the Holy Quran which takes about one hour if justice is to be done to this recitation. Present day almanacs give the precise

time of sun-set and sun-rise. Muslim communities publish time-tables for the commencement of the fast (about one hour before sun-rise, *Sehr*) and the breaking of the fast (at sun-set, when the night approaches from the east and the sun is submerged beyond the horizon, *Iftar*) and such time-tables are normally reliable. In most Muslim countries, the people determine their fast according to the Call for Prayers, the *Azan*: you must stop eating when the morning *Azan* ends and you should break the fast immediately when the evening *Azan* starts.

Some people ridicule Islam by stating that it may be correct for people to fast but what about the people who live near the poles and have the mid-night sun. Islam is a universal religion meant for all pople in all parts of the earth. The Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, made a prophecy about such circumstances too. A time would come when Islam would spread to a place where the sun never sets. Asked 1400 years ago what Muslims should do to fulfill their obligation for prayers and fasting, the Prophet said that they should reckon a day by twelve hours duration (so that a Muslim may fast from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. in such areas) (Muslim: Ch. Ashrat al-Saah).

Anticipation of Ramadhan With One or Two Fasts

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: Do not observe the fast on two days preceding Ramadhan, but this does not apply to one who has made a practice of it. (Bukhari and Muslim). Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet said: When the middle of Shaban (before Ramadhan) arrives, do not observe a fast during the rest of it. (Tirmidhi).

Fasting Procedure: *Niyah*

A person who wishes to observe the fast must express his or her intention to fast in words such as: I hereby express my intention to keep the fast of tomorrow during the month of Ramadhan.

Wabesawme Ghadinnawayto Min Shahre Ramadhana

The above intention '*Niyah*' must be repeated for each fast on the night before the fast. A person may do Niyah and yet not be able to fast the next day but not vice-a-versa.

Sehr — Pre-Dawn Meals

Anas, on whom be peace, says: the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: serve yourselves with breakfast, for they are blessed. (Bukhari and Muslim). In Musnad-i-Ahmad it is written that pre-dawn meals are blessed, therefore they should not be left out even though it may consist of a mouthful of water, for God and His angels shower blessings upon those who partake of pre-dawn meals.

Amr ibn Aas says: the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: the distinctive feature between our fasts and those of the people of the Book is the eating of breakfast. (Muslim).

It is patently obvious that one should get up for the early morning Tahajjud prayers and have a light breakfast, although a fast is nonetheless valid if one should have expressed the intention to fast the night before, overslept and be unable to have had any breakfast, (Sehr).

Anas says that Zaid bin Sabit told him that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, took pre-dawn meals with them and then led the prayers. I asked , how long was the interval between the meals and the call for prayers and he

answered that it was the time required for the recital of fifty verses. (Bukhari and Muslim).

Eating or Drinking by Mistake

Hazrat Abu Huraira, on whom be peace, relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: Should any of you eat or drink in forgetfulness of the fast, he should continue his fast till the end, for Allah has fed him and given him to drink. (Bukhari and Muslim).

However, anyone who eats or drinks in forgetfulness, and, having realised his mistake, still continues to eat or drink. has effectively broken his fast.

Early Breaking of Fast

Sahl ibn Sa'ad, on whom be peace, relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: My people will adhere to good as long as thy do not delay the breaking of the fast. (Bukhari and Muslim). In another Hadith, Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet said that Allah, the Lord of honour and glory proclaimed: Of My servants I love most those who are foremost in breaking their fasts. (Tirmidhi).

In view of these sayings of the Holy Prophet and of God Almighty, it is essential that a fast should be ended immediately after the sunset as there is no merit in prolonging it beyond this point.

Prayer at Ending the Fast

Allahhumma laka sumto wa'laa rizqeka 'aftarto

Hazrat Maaz ibn Zahra, on whom be peace, says that he heard that whenever the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of

Allah be upon him, used to end his fast, he used to pray: O our Lord, for Your sake I kept the fast and with Your food have I ended it. Ibn Umar said that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of God be upon him, used to say at ending a fast: Thirst has disappeared and veins have received nourishment , and, God willing, reward has been secured.

With What to End the Fast

Salman ibn Aamir Dhabi, on whom be peace, relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: if any among you keep a fast, he should end it with a date or else with water for it is pure (Abu Daud and Tirmidhi). Dates need no artificial preservative and have a high glucose content value which helps to revitalise the body rather quickly. They also have a fair proportion of iron in them.

Exemption for Pregnant and Suckling Women

Anas relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: indeed, God has exempted a pregnant or a suckling woman from fasting. (The fasts thus lost can be kept after the disability has disappeared. The same applies to a sick person and women during their monthly periods).

A woman may do 'Niyah' while in menstruation in anticipation, and, should before dawn her monthly period have ended, the fast would be valid.

Fast and Travel

Ayesha, the wife of the Holy Prophet, says that Hamza bin Amr-il-Aslami who used to keep regular fasts told the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, that he fasted even when he was travelling. The Holy Prophet replied it was up

to him to keep or not to keep the fast. (This in fact relates to voluntary fasts).

Jabir relates: Once the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was on a journey and he saw a crowd around a person over whom a shade had been erected. He asked what was the matter, and the people replied that the man was fasting. The Holy Prophet replied, it was no virtue to keep a fast while travelling. (The Holy Prophet did sometime fast while travelling but this happened only when he was keeping voluntary fasts; otherwise, as far as the fasts during the month of Ramadhan are concerned, it is the Quranic injunction not to fast while travelling but to make up the lost count on other days. However, if a traveller wishes to stay at a certain place during his journeys for at least fifteen days or more, then he should keep the fasts).

Recompense for Sex While Fasting

Abu Huraira relates that once we were sitting with the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessing of Allah be upon him when a man came and cried: 0 Messenger of Allah, I have indeed been doomed! The Holy Prophet asked what the matter was and the man replied that he had consorted with his wife while he was fasting. The Holy Prophet asked him whether he could afford to free a slave and he replied that he could not do so. He asked him whether he could fast continuously for two months and the man replied no. He asked him whether he could feed sixty poor and the man replied no. The Holy Prophet asked him to sit down and wait. Shortly thereafter, a basket of dates was brought by someone to the Holy Prophet whereupon he called for the person in question and asked him to feed those dates to the poor. The man said: By God, O Messenger of Allah, there is no house poorer than mine in this valley. This made the Holy Prophet laugh so

that even his back teeth could be seen, and said: All right, go and feed them to your family.

Should a person have consorted with his wife during the night, he should have a bath prior to the start of the fast

On miscellaneous matters

- Anas relates that someone came to the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and said: I have an eye complaint. Is it possible to treat my eyes with antimony while I am fasting? The Holy Prophet replied: yes.

- Aamir ibn Rabia says that several times he saw the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, brush his teeth while he was fasting.

- A companion of the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, says that he saw the Holy Prophet at a place called Araj, drenching his head with water, while he was fasting, because of thirst or heat. Care should be exercised when performing ablutions so that one does not swallow water.

- Voluntary vomission, taking injection or enema treatment are infringements of fasts. If vomitting causes weakness, the fast can be ended. For intentional infringement of a fast during the month of Ramadhan, it is not only necessary to keep another fast on another day but also to observe the penalty of keeping sixty successive fasts or to feed sixty poor people either in one place or separately or to feed one similar person for sixty days or to pay an equivalent sum of money, or to free a slave.

- Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: if anyone hears the call to prayers while he is still in the process of drinking or eating the final portions, he should complete the process or eating or drinking.

- Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may pence and blessings of Allah be upon him, would persuade voluntary prayers during Ramadhan but would not order them imperatively. He said: He who maintains voluntary prayers throughout Ramadhan, out of sincerity of faith and in hope of earning merit, will have his past sins forgiven him. (Muslim).

- Zaid ibn Khalid Juhni relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: He who provides for the breaking of fast of another earns the same merit as the one who was observing the fast without diminishing in any way the reward of the latter. (Tirmidhi). Anas relates that the Holy Prophet came to visit Sa'ad ibn Ubadah who brought bread and olive oil and presented it to him. The Holy Prophet partook of it and said: Those who were fasting have broken their fast with you and the righteous have eaten your food while the angels were calling down blessings on you. (Abu Daud).

The Night Prayers

Abu Hurairah relates that the Holy Prophet said: The best month for fasting next after Ramadhan is Muharram, and the best prayer next after the prescribed prayers is Prayer at Night. (Muslim). The Prophet also observed the fast during the greater part of Sha'ban. (Muslim).

Ibn Umar relates that the Holy Prophet said: Night prayer is a succession of two *raka'as* at a time, and when you perceive the

approach of dawn add a single *raka'a* to make an odd number. (Bukhari and Muslim).

Jabir relates that the Holy Prophet was asked: Which prayer is best? He answered: The one in which the worshipper makes a long stand. The Holy Prophet once said: Every night there is a brief space of time during which whatever of good pertaining to this life or the next a Muslim supplicates for, it is granted him. (Muslim).

Ayesha relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, never offered more than eleven *raka'as* at night during Ramadhan or at any other time. He would offer four *raka'as* long and perfect, and then four of the same type and then three (*vitr*). I asked him: Messenger of Allah, do you sleep before offering *vitr*? He answered: Ayesha, my eyes sleep but my heart does not (Bukhari and Muslim).

The *Tahajjud* prayers described above is a voluntary prayer comprising of two to eight *raka'as*, offered, in succession of twos or fours, from midnight till dawn manifests itself. It is concluded by three *raka'as* of *vitr*. It may be offered individually or in congregation. The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam attaches great importance to this prayer.

The *Taraveeh* prayers is actually an extension of the *Tahajjud* prayers offered by the Holy Prophet. It was introduced by Hazrat Umar as a congregational or individual prayer for the month of Ramadhan. The Taraveeh prayer is offered after two voluntary *raka'as* of the *Isha*prayers (the last of the five compulsory prayers). It comprises of eight *raka'as*, again offered in succession of twos or fours and concluded with the *vitr* prayers in congregation. The *Taraveeh* prayers were essentially introduced to prevent the habit, still prevalent among some Muslims, to retire to bed immediately after a hearty

meal (*Iftar*) and the offering of the *Maghrib* and *Isha* prayers. An opportunity is frequently taken of completing the entire Quran, from beginning to end, in phased stages, during Ramadhan through *Taraveeh* prayers led by a *Hafiz-ul-Quran* (an individual who has committed the Quran to memory).

It goes without saying that the *Tahajjud* prayers are preferred to the *Taraveeh* prayers. A Muslim is required to carry out all his normal functions during the month of Ramadhan e.g. if he is a businessman, he may still carry out his business duties while fasting during the day time. However, in some Muslim countries, Ramadhan is an official month of holidays. Muslims in such countries engage themselves in heavy meals in the evening in an attempt to make up for what they have lost. They then sleep the night through and miss out the pre-dawn meal. These practices are not what Islam recommends but what some Muslims have devised for themselves. The emphasis is on prayers; not on sleep.

'Itikaf

The last ten days of the month of Ramadhan. Having completed 20 days of fastings in the month of Ramadhan, a believer feels a sense of achievement towards the attainment of God's pleasure and therefore wishes to complete the remaining ten days with greater vigour and enthusiasm. It is reported that the Holy Prophet used to tighten his girdle, keep awake for most of the night for prayers and exhort his family to do the same during the last ten days of Ramadhan. Ayesha further reported that every year till the time of his death, the Holy Prophet used to go into retreat into the mosque during these ten days and nights of Ramadhan, and the same practice was continued by his wives after his demise. This retreat starts after the morning prayers on the 20th of Ramadhan. It is permissible for a person observing this seclusion to go out of the mosque for Friday prayers or for personal hygienic matters. It is reported that the Holy Prophet, while walking outside the mosque, used to enquire about a person's health without stopping.

Abu Hurairah relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, went into retreat for ten days in the month of Ramadhan but in the year in which he died he went into retreat for twenty days. (Bukhari).

This period of retreat of the last ten days of Ramadhan is known as '*Itikaf*' and is devoted to silent meditation, recitation or study of religious books, prayers and supplication. This short burst of meditation and 'soul-searching' is much better than the prolonged exposure to the physical exercise of yoga and transcendental meditation which has become all the rage inl the west. During *itikaf* sex is totally forbidden even at night.

Night of Decree

Surely, We sent down the Quran during the Night of Decree. How shouldst thou know what is the Night of Decree? The Night off Decrees is better than a thousand months. Therein descend angels and the Spirit by the command of their Lord with their Lord's decrees concerning every matter. It is all peace till the break of dawn. (Holy Quran Ch. 97:2-6).

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: He who offers voluntary prayers during the Night of Decree out of sincerity of faith and in hope of earning merit will have his past sins forgiven him. (Bukhari and Muslim).

Ibn Umar relates that some of the companions of the Holy Prophet dreamt that the Night of Decree was among the last seven nights of Ramadhan, whereupon the Holy Prophet said: I see that your dreams all agree upon the last seven nights. Whoever, then, seeks the Night of Decree should look for it among the last seven nights of Ramadban. (Bukhari and Muslim).

Ayesha relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: seek the Night of Decree among the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadhan (i.e. 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th). Anas says that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of God be upon him, said: During the Night of Decree, the Archangel, Gabriel, appears with a host of angels and all of them pray for the person who may be standing or silting in prayers to Allah the Exalted.

Special Prayers for the Night of Decree

Ayesha relates that she asked the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, that if ever she happened to discover the Night of Decree, what special prayer should she recite. The Holy Prophet advised her to say: O our Lord! You are forgiveness personified, Who loves forgiving, therefore forgive me.

Allahhumma innaka 'afowun tohibhul 'afwa fa'fo anniy

O Our Lord! You ore forgiveness personified, Who loves forgiving, therefore forgive me.

Fitr Contributions. At the end of the month of Ramadhan there is a small contribution on behalf of all members of the family to be used for the benefit of the needy. It is reported that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, prescribed this contribution at the end of Ramadhan. It was then equivalent to a measure (said to be *sa'a*approximately six pounds in weight) of dates or cereals, payable by every free person or servant, male or female, young or old from amongst the believers. An equivalent amount in money may also be paid instead of food grams.

Fitrana is even payable on behalf of a baby born just before Eid prayers. The Ahmadiyya community also contributes to the Eid Fund which is used for similar purposes and is payable by all earning members of the community. Rates for this are determined by local communities.

Expiation. Persons suffering from illness or those who cannot fast due to old age should, unless the disability is of a more permanent nature, fast and complete the reckoning on other days and expiate the omission by feeding a person for every day of the month of Ramadhan, provided of course they are financially able to do so. This type of feeding or paying of an

equivalent amount on behalf of a deceased is also permissible. It incorporates food which one is normally accustomed to having for one's meals.

This is known as 'Fiddya' and it may be offered at any time during the year i.e., the reckoning may be completed when the disability disappears or the journey ends. The emphasis in the above on the word '*and*' cannot be stressed any further as we believe that the expiation can only be achieved by fasting and the feeding of a person as soon as possible. As life is finite, one must not delay in observing this commandment. (See also 'Sayings of the Promised Messiah').

Eid-ul-Filr. At the end of the month of Ramadhan the festival to mark the end of fasts is celebrated by congregational prayers. This is governed by the following injunctions:

1. To proceed to the prayers of Eid-ul-Fitr after paying the Fitr contributions (see above).

2. It is desirable to have a bath in the morning.

3. The use of scents was a tradition of the Holy Prophet.

4. The Holy Prophet used to eat something before going to Eid-ul-Fitr prayers.

5. It was the practice of the Holy Prophet to proceed for the prayers on foot and to return by a different route.

6. Women are also exhorted to come to the prayers.

7. There is no Azan (Call to Prayers) nor Iqama (the shorter call) before the Eid-ui-Fitr prayers.

8. There are twelve *Takbirats* (with both hands raised ear high and saying Allaho Akbar, Allah is the Greatest) in the Prayers, seven in the first Rakaat and five in the second.

9. The Holy Prophet is reported to have exhorted the believers to decorate the Eid prayers with special Takbirs.[1]

10. Prayers are followed by a sermon which forms part of the Eid prayers and should be listened to attentively.

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[1] Allaho Akbar, Allaho Akbar, Lailaha Illollaho, Wallah Akbar, Allaho Akbar, Walillahil Hamd (Allah is Great, Allah is Great; There is none worthy of worship save Allah; Allah is Great, Allah is Great; All praise belongs to Allah).

Voluntary Fasts

Some people 'fast to death' for political or other reasons. This is not what Islam requires. Voluntary fasts, under the broad rules described in previous pages, may be observed at any time of the year. We quote following traditions.

1. Mujiba Bahiliyyah relates on the authority of her father or uncle that he visited the Holy Prophet and returned and visited him again after the interval of a year. In the meantime his appearance and condition had changed. When he came to him the second time, he asked him, Messenger of Allah, do you recognise me? The Holy Prophet inquired: Who are you? He answered: I am the Bahili who visited you last year. The Holy Prophet said: You were quite handsome, what has altered you so much? He answered: Since I parted from you, I have not eaten except at night. The Holy Prophet observed: You have tormented yourself needlessly. You should observe the fast during Ramadhan and on one day in every month. He urged: Permit me to do more for I am strong. The Holy Prophet said: Then observe the fast during two days in every month. He said: Permit me to do more. The Holy Prophet said: Then observe the fast during three days in every month. He pleaded for more. The Holy Prophet said: During the four sacred months fast for three days and abstain from fasting for three days alternately. (Abu Daud).

2. Ibn Abbas relates that the Holy Prophet said: There are no days during which righteous action is so pleasing to Allah as righteous action in the first ten days of Zil Hajj. He was asked: Messenger of Allah, not even striving in the cause of Allah? He answered: Not even striving in the cause of Allah

except in the case of one who goes forth with his life and his property and does not come back with either. (Bukhari).

3. Abu Qatadah relates in two separate traditions that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was asked about observing the fast on the day of Arafat and on the tenth day of Muharram. He said for each: It atones for the sins of the preceding year. For the day of Arafat it also atones for the sins of the subsequent year. (Muslim).

4. Abu Ayub relates that the Holy Prophet said: He who observes the fast throughout Ramadhan and then follows it up with observing the fast on the first six days of Shawal is as if he had observed the fast throughout the year. (Muslim).

5. Abu Qatadah relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was asked about observing the fast on Monday and answered: That is the day on which I was born and the day on which I received the call (or revelation). (Muslim).

6. Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: A man's deeds are reported on Mondays and Thursdays and I prefer that I should be observing the fast when my deeds are reported. (Tirmidhi). Ayesha relates that the Holy Prophet was diligent in observing the fast on Mondays and Thursdays. (Tirmidhi).

7. Mu'azah Adawiah relates that she asked Ayesha: Did the Holy Prophet observe fast on three days during every month? And she said: Yes. I asked her: During which part of the month did he fast. She answered: He did not mind which part it was. (Muslim). Abu Dharr relates that the Holy Prophet said: If you observe fast on three days in a

month, then make them the days of the 13th, 14th and 15th nights of the moon. (Tirmidhi).

8. Ibn Umar relates that the Holy Prophet forbade the continuation of a fast beyond one day. It was said to him: But you do it. He answered: I am not like you. I am given to eat and to drink. (Bukhari and Muslim).

9. Abu Hurairah relates that the Holy Prophet said: Do not select the night previous to Friday specially for voluntary prayers nor select Friday specially for observing a fast unless it should happen to be one of the days on which one normally observes a fast (Muslim). Juwairiah bint Harith relates that the Holy Prophet visited her on Friday and she was fasting. He asked her: Did you observe the fast yesterday? She said: No. He asked: Do you intend to observe the fast tomorrow. She said: No. He said: In that case give up your fast today. (Bukhari).

10. Abu Hurairah relates that the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: It is not permissible for a woman to observe a voluntary fast when her husband is at home, except with his permission. Nor should she permit anyone to enter his house without his leave. (Bukhari and Muslim).

The Sayings of the Promised Messiah

1. "Insofar as I am concerned, I do not leave a fast unless it is likely to cause my death; I don't feel inclined to leave a fast. These are blessed days and are the days of the showerings of God's blessings and mercy" (Al-Hakm, 24.1.1901)

2. "Ramadhan is a blessed month, a month of prayers." (Al Hakm, 24.1.1901)

3. It is reported in Hadith that two types of people are the most unfortunate: one who lived through Ramadhan and failed to have his sins forgiven; the other who had his parents and they passed and he was unable to have his sin remitted. While a child is in the care of his parents, they bear all his worries and troubles. A man comes to know the value of his parents when he himself becomes responsible for his own affairs. In the Holy Quran, God has given a degree of preference to a mother, for a mother bears the hardship for her child. However infectious a disease a child may catch, maybe smallpox, cholera or plague, a mother never leaves her child. Once my daughter had cholera and her mother used to handle her vomissions and other secretions with her own hands. A mother partakes of all her child's afflictions. This is out of natural love of which there is no parallel." (Majmooa Fatawa Ahmadiyya, Vol. I, p. 182).

4. Once the Promised Messiah was asked about fasting while travelling. The Promised Messiah replied: "As far as the Holy Quran is concerned, it says: 'Whoso among you is sick or is on a journey shall fast the same number of other days'. This means that a sick person or a traveller must not fast. This is an order and there is no option from God Almighty.

In my view, a traveller should not fast. However, some people do keep fasts as a matter of course and if they do so while travelling in pursuit of this practice. there is no prohibition although one must still have regard for the injunction: "shall fast the same number of other days." A person who goes to consider able trouble in keeping a fast while travelling tries to please God by force rather than earning His pleasure by following His commandment. This is a mistake. True belief consists of following the injunctions and prohibitions of Allah." (Maj mooa Fatawa Ahmadiyya, Vol. I, p. 179).

5. A person told the Promised Messiah that while he was at home he honestly believed that there was still some time before the starting of the fast and therefore he ate something with the intention of keeping the fast on that day. Later on he had learnt from someone else that dawn had already occurred by that specified time. This person therefore asked whether be could continue with the fast of that day. The Promised Messiah replied: In these circumstances, he had a legitimate fast and there was no need for substitution on another day, for he did his best and his intention was perfect." (Majmooa Fatawa Ahmadiyya.Vol. I, p. 183)

Perhaps, we should also add here a word of caution. It is the practice among some ill-informed Muslims that they encourage very young children to fast. In fact, some people have been so orthodox that deaths of young children have occurred in some families. This is not what God Almighty requires. Hazrat Khalifatul-Masih II, the son of the Promised Messiah, recalls that the very first fast he kept was at the age of 12 to 13 years. At that time, he kept only one fast for the whole month. It appears from the practice of the Promised Messiah therefore that fasts should not be encouraged among children who have not reached their teens. By the age of 18 or 19 years, a Muslim boy or girl may be

encouraged to fast for a whole month. Hazrat Khalifatul-Masih II, then states that these age guidelines he had given should obviously be varied according to the pbysical growth of the child as a child may be 16 years of age, but physically it may be of an equivalent age of say a 14 year old. It is quite wrong to assume that forcing a young child, of say eight years of age, to fast will earn the parents any reward. On the contrary, it will invite God's displeasure.